

# GOOD NEWS FOR THE FRINGE

***As a result of this study, we hope the participants will***

*[Learning Objectives]*

- identify the sorts of people who received Jesus' personal ministry
- correlate these beneficiaries with the basic mission Jesus was pursuing
- recognize the counter-cultural nature of Jesus' reaction to fringe people
- feel Christ's empathy for themselves in the inner place that feels marginalized or ignored
- be moved to show compassion and tenderness to the overlooked, as Christ did
- grapple with the spiritual tensions that go with wealth and happiness (distinct from poverty and discouragement), and identify the points of temptation in their lives, as applicable
- resolve to do one thing to represent Christ's love for fringe people in a contemporary setting.

*[Process Objectives]*

- develop the ability to tell a Bible story and attach their testimony to it
- get a taste of the value of comparing gospel accounts of the same event, for the purpose of identifying Luke's unique emphasis
- continue to make the time commitment to prepare for the next lesson

*[Relational Objectives]*

- open up a vulnerable side by sharing an identification with one of Jesus' "fringe people"
- discuss ways to open their circle of relationships to those most often overlooked

## **NOTES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS (PAGES 40-43)**

The point of this lesson is that Jesus noticed and cared about people who were otherwise on the fringe of first century society. He violated taboos and even religious law that declared touching lepers, associating with sinners, and coming into contact with bleeding women as defiling, or making one unclean. Jesus' actions turned the tables on the society's expectations, by denying that their touch defiled *him*, but demonstrating that *his* touch healed *them!* The power flowed from him to those who needed forgiveness and healing, not the other way around. In this lesson, we are encouraged to recognize that same power to bring healing and hope to the fringe people in our lives, without fear that associating with them will taint our reputation or standing before God. And just in case anyone of us may be experienced at the fringe, the good news of the gospel is within reach—so let us touch the hem of Jesus' robe!

**PAGE 40 NOTES:**

This cluster of mid-gospel close encounters with Jesus give us glimpses into the needs and heartaches of the region, and the tender heart of our savior! Jesus shows amazement at the centurion’s faith (remember, he was a Roman), his heart goes out to the widow whose only son has died; he recognizes the gratitude and devotion of a woman who has fully experienced God’s forgiveness; and shows tenderness to a synagogue ruler (not usually on Jesus’ list of favorite people) and a woman suffering from a 12-year hemorrhage (“unclean” according to Jewish law).

Nain is a little town in Galilee, mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament, but situated a few miles from Nazareth to this day.

In the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10), Jesus stands up for Mary, who has chosen to spend time with him rather than in the traditional household role of women. Martha, doing all the work, also receives some grace (along with the gentle rebuke) from Jesus, but the lesson is this: your social role or your counter-cultural devotion to Jesus are valued by God.

The Ten Lepers of Luke 17 are healed, just by Jesus looking at them. Only one—and a Samaritan at that!—returned to thank him. Jesus affirms the returning one and misses the others, suggesting that Christ’s care of social outcasts continues even after they have been integrated back into society.

**PAGE 41 NOTES:**

The recipients of Jesus’ blessings are all social outcasts, of various kinds. In the extreme, “unclean” (lepers, bleeding woman), then “immoral” (the Samaritan leper, the woman with a sinful past), “merely female” (Martha) or “not one of us” (the Roman centurion’s servant). They represent the ones that proper society did not associate with. Ordinarily, most of them would have been shunned or avoided, and certainly not *touched*! The general effect of their contact with Christ was healing, forgiveness, and freedom from social stigma.

Remember, in Lesson Three, we discussed Jesus’ mission statement. What follows is a table comparing that job description with the events of Luke 6:20-26.

Luke 4 Mission Statement	Luke 6 (version of Beatitudes):
Preach to the poor	Blessed are the poor • theirs is God’s kingdom
Freedom of prisoners	The excluded • they will be brought in
Sight for the blind	
Release for the oppressed	Those who weep • they will laugh

The “woes” of Luke 6 are not saying that the rich, well-fed, happy, and upstanding people were disqualified from blessing. Jesus was warning that there are temptations that go with wealth and privilege, and they must keep on alert for the hypnotizing lure of self-satisfaction, gratification and laughter. Rather (it is implied), the well-healed must be diligent to cultivate spiritual hunger and dependence upon God, when everything else around them says, “Depend on us.”

After exploring these encounters with Jesus, we can appreciate more fully the promises and prophecies of Luke 1. God sent an angel to explain *The Plan* to Mary and reassure her that all was well. Mary appreciated that God was mindful of her humble estate, that the Mighty One had done great things with a very obscure girl, that God's mercy extends to all who fear him, and that God delights in lifting up the humble, filling the hungry, and helping the teeny tiny country of Israel.

Jesus demonstrated these concerns of his heavenly Father in the way he showed tenderness and compassion to the humble he encountered. He not only addressed their earthly concerns, but also dealt with the spiritual issue by forgiving sin.

### **PAGES 42 AND 43 NOTES:**

There are two avenues for application of this lesson's scriptures. One is identification with the outcast (and the invitation to receive the touch and healing and welcome of Jesus) and the other is discovering God's heart for the social outcasts around us.

The first question explores the individual's identification with one of the outcasts of the gospel. The hope would be that the reader would experience the same sense of relief, gratitude or blessing that one of those characters experienced.

Otherwise, on page 43 the participants are encouraged to look around and see the fringe people they have been missing up until now. One lady became aware (through her volunteer service at a homeless shelter) that there were people living under a freeway overpass near her home. She decided to take sandwiches to them on a particularly bad weather day, as a way of "seeing them."

### **NOTES RELATED TO THE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (PAGE 44-45)**

**Open your meeting with prayer** that the Lord would give you eyes to see people from his perspective. Read the following hymn text to conclude your prayer:

Open my eyes, that I may see	Silently now I wait for Thee,
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;	Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Place in my hands the wonderful key	Open my eyes, illumine me,
That shall unclasp and set me free.	Spirit divine!

—Words & Music by Clara H. Scott (1895), public domain

**PAGE 44 NOTES:**

The first question can be answered to as great a depth as each participant is willing. Encourage each to tell the Bible story in his or her own words, and then explain the personal “point of contact.” This gives everyone a chance to get into the gospel account, but also to share from personal experience. The experience might not have been met with faith before, so encourage those who share to see Christ in the midst of whatever vulnerability they admit.

The sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet met with at least two reactions: Jesus’ and the dinner host’s. The dinner host’s reaction would have been the typical sneer expected of “holy” people (but note also in the text their put-down of Jesus’ ability to discern what was up with this woman). Jesus’ reaction was empathy, support and appreciation for her symbolic gesture.

Putting the Matthew, Mark and John texts side-by-side for comparison, notice the differences (e.g. the name of the table host). But it becomes clear that the Luke version is the longest, giving greatest detail to the woman’s devoted act. The reaction of the onlookers was not about the expense of the perfume, but about the kind of woman who was making this gesture. The message is quite clear, in Luke your past does not disqualify you from coming to Jesus, and your devotion is in proportion to the number of sins Jesus has forgiven.

Also note that the Luke version has Jesus observing the difference between the reception given him by the woman vs. the reception he receives from the host who should have known better.

Finally, only in Luke does Jesus address the woman directly. This tells you that Luke is focusing on the personal aspect of Jesus’ ministry, built upon relationship with him and not merely on the doctrinal statements about him.

**PAGE 45 NOTES:**

In Luke 5:27-32, Jesus calls a tax collector to join him. Then this social outcast (a Jewish citizen hired by Roman authorities to collect taxes from Jews, often charging extra as “commission”) threw a big dinner party for Jesus and ‘sinners’ as well. The Pharisees—the Jewish sect most concerned with ritual purity—protest that Jesus is spending way too much time with questionable people. But Jesus explains his choice as focusing on those who know they need spiritual help, rather than wasting his time with people who claim to be doing fine without help. His ministry is a spiritual one in this instance: calling sinners to repentance.

Does Jesus love the outcast more than the privileged? I doubt it, but Jesus *does not overlook them* like everybody else does, and to the privileged that attention may feel like a preference (i.e. “favor”). This simply points to a false view of God that says, “There is a limited amount of love out there, and if other people get it, there’s less left for me.”

### **CLOSING PRAYER TIME**

Open your concluding prayer time by reading the third verse of “Open My Eyes”:

Open my mouth, and let me bear,	Silently now I wait for Thee,
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;	Ready my God, Thy will to see,
Open my heart and let me prepare	Open my eyes, illumine me,
Love with Thy children thus to share.	Spirit divine!

Go around the circle and recount the outcasts and overlooked people that have been mentioned throughout today’s study. Gather thoughts for prayer, and then ask each person to lift up one of these fringe people (or groups) and pray mightily not only for God’s intervention in their lives but for their participation in his work to offer redemption, healing and forgiveness.